

Study and Learning

יְתִיחַשׁ יֵאֵה, בּוֹיָה-לֵב; רְתַרְתּוּ יִתְבַּהֵא-הֶמְ

O how I love Your teaching! It is my study all day long.

--Psalm (*Tehilim*) 119, verse 97

אֵלוּ דְבָרִים שְׂאִין לָהֶם שִׁיעוּר--הַפִּיָּאָה, וְהַבִּיבּוּרִים, וְהַרִיָּאִיוֹן, וְגַמְלֵיּוֹת חֲסָדִים, וְתִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה. וְאֵלוּ דְבָרִים שְׂאָדָם אוֹכֵל מִפִּירוֹתֶיהֶן בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, וְהַקָּרָן קִיּוּמָת לֹא לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא--כִּיבוּד אָב וְאִם, וְגַמְלֵיּוֹת חֲסָדִים, וְהַבָּאָת שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אָדָם לְחֶבְרֹ; וְתִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה כְּנִגְדַּ בּוֹלָם.

These are the mitzvot for which there is no prescribed measure: leaving crops at the corner of a field for the poor; offering first fruits as a gift to the Temple; bringing special offerings to the Temple on the three festivals; doing deeds of loving-kindness; and the study of the Torah. These are the mitzvot which yield immediate fruit [reward] and continue to yield fruit in time to come: honoring father and mother, deeds of loving-kindness, making peace between one person and another. And the study of Torah is equal to all of them.

--*Mishnah*, Zeraim, Peah 1.1

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אוֹמֵר, עֲשֵׂה לָךְ רַב, וְקַנְה לָךְ חֶבֶר; וְהָיִי דָן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת.

Joshua ben Perachyah said, “Get yourself a teacher, find someone to study with, and judge everyone favorably.”

--Pirke Avot 1:6

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסִי בֶּן קִסְמָא, פְּעַם אַחַת הָיִיתִי מְהַלֵּךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּפְגַע בִּי אָדָם אֶחָד וְנָתַן לִי שְׁלוֹם וְהִחְזִירָתִי לֹא שְׁלוֹם. אָמַר לִי, רַבִּי, מֵאִיזָה מְקוֹם אָתָּה. אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ, מֵעִיר גְּדוֹלָה שֶׁל חֲכָמִים וְשֶׁל סוֹפְרִים אָנִי. אָמַר לִי, רַבִּי, רְצוּנָךְ שֶׁתְּדוּר עִמָּנוּ בְּמִקְוֵמָנוּ וְאָנִי אֶתֵּן לָךְ אֶלֶף אֶלְפִים דִּינָרֵי זָהָב וְאֶבְנִים טוֹבוֹת וּמַרְגְּלִיּוֹת. אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ, אִם אַתָּה נוֹתֵן לִי כָּל כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וְאֶבְנִים טוֹבוֹת וּמַרְגְּלִיּוֹת שְׁבַע עוֹלָם, אִינִי דָר אֶלָּא בְּמִקְוֵם תּוֹרָה.

Rabbi Yose ben Kisma said, “Once I was traveling and a man met me and greeted me. When I returned his greeting, he said to me, ‘Rabbi, where do you come from?’ I replied, ‘From a great city of sages and scholars.’ He then said, ‘Rabbi, would you be willing to live with us in our place? [If you would] I would give you a million golden dinars along with precious stones and pearls!’ I said to him, ‘Were you to give me all the silver and gold and precious stones and pearls in the world, I would live only in a place of Torah!’”

--Pirke Avot 6:9

אָמרו עָליו על הַלַּל הַזֶּקֶן שֶׁבְּכָל יוֹם יוֹם הָיָה עוֹשֶׂה וּמִשְׁתַּבֵּר בְּטַרְפְּעִיק, חָצִיו הָיָה נוֹתֵן לְשׁוֹמֵר בֵּית הַמְדֻרָשׁ, וְחָצִיו לְפִרְנָסָתוֹ וּלְפִרְנָסַת אֲנָשֵׁי בֵיתוֹ. פְּעַם אַחַת לֹא מָצָא לְהִשְׁתַּבֵּר, וְלֹא הִנְיָחוּ שׁוֹמְרֵי בֵּית הַמְדֻרָשׁ לְהַכְנִיס. עָלָה וּנְתַלָּה וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל פִּי אַרְוֵבָה כְּדִי שִׁישְׁמַע דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים מִפִּי שְׁמַעְיָה וְאַבְטָלְיוֹן. אָמְרוּ: אוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם עָרַב שֶׁבֶת הָיָה, וְתַקּוּפַת טַבַּת הָיְתָה, וַיֵּרֵד עָלָיו שֶׁלֶג מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. בְּשַׁעֲלָה עַמּוּד הַשַּׁחַר אָמַר לוֹ שְׁמַעְיָה לְאַבְטָלְיוֹן: אַבְטָלְיוֹן אַחִי! בְּכָל יוֹם הַבַּיִת מְאִיר, וְהַיּוֹם אֶפְלָל, שְׁמָא יוֹם הַמְּעוֹנָן הוּא? הֲצִיצוּ עֵינֵיהֶן וְרָאוּ דְמוּת אָדָם בְּאַרְוֵבָה, עָלוּ וּמָצְאוּ עָלָיו רוּם שְׁלֹשׁ אַמּוֹת שֶׁלֶג. פְּרָקוּהוּ וְהִרְחִיצוּהוּ וְסִיבּוּהוּ וְהוֹשִׁיבוּהוּ בְּנֶגֶד הַמְדוּרָה. אָמְרוּ: רָאִי זֶה לְחַלֵּל עָלָיו אֶת הַשֶּׁבֶת.

Hillel the Elder was a poor man. He worked every day and earned only half a dinar. He gave half of this to the guard at the house of study to pay for his lessons and used the other half to support himself and his family.

One Friday night [before Shabbat began] Hillel earned no money, and the guard at the house of study would not permit him to enter. Hillel climbed up to the roof and put his head against the skylight, where he could hear the words spoken by the rabbis Shemaiyah and Avtalyon. As he lay on the roof, heavy snow began to fall on him. But Hillel remained in his place all night.

The next morning, Shemaiyah said to avtalyon, “This house is light every day, but today it is dark. Is it cloudy outside?”

They looked up and saw the shape of a man in the skylight. They climbed to the roof and found Hillel, covered with snow and almost frozen to death. They carried him down, bathed him and put oils on him, and placed him near the fire. [Note: All of these actions are against the mitzvot of Shabbat.] And they said, “This man is worthy of breaking the mitzvot of Shabbat!”

--Babylonian *Talmud*, Yoma 35b

“וְהַמְשֻׁפָּלִים יִזְהִירוּ כְּזוֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ” וְגו’ (דְּנִיּאֵל יב) -- זֶה דִּינֵין שְׂדָן דִּין אֱמֶת לְאַמְתּוֹ; «וּמְצַדִּיקֵי הַרְבֵּים פְּבוֹכְבֵּים לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד» -- אֵלּוּ גַבְאֵי צְדָקָה. בְּמַתְנִיתָא תְּנָא: “וְהַמְשֻׁפָּלִים יִזְהִירוּ כְּזוֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ” -- זֶה דִּינֵין שְׂדָן דִּין אֱמֶת לְאַמְתּוֹ וְגַבְאֵי צְדָקָה; «וּמְצַדִּיקֵי הַרְבֵּים פְּבוֹכְבֵּים לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד» -- אֵלּוּ מְלַמְדֵי תִינּוּקוֹת. כְּגוֹן מֵאֵן? אָמַר רַב: כְּגוֹן רַב שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר שִׁילַת. דְּרַב אֲשַׁפְחִיָּה לְרַב שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר שִׁילַת דְּהוּא קָאֵי בְּגִינְתָא, אָמַר לֵיהּ: שְׁבַקְתִּיָּה לְהִימְנוּתָךְ? אָמַר לֵיהּ: הָא תְּלִיסָר שָׁנִין דְּלֹא חֲזִיא לִי, וְהִשְׁתָּא נְמִי דַּעְתָּאֵי עֲלוּיָהּ. וְרַבְנֵן מֵאֵי? אָמַר רַבִּינָא: «וְאֹהֲבֵי כִצְאָת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּגִבּוֹרְתוֹ» (שׁוֹפְטִים ה).

The Gemara extols the virtues of charity collectors:

Scripture states: “**And the wise will shine like the radiance of the firmament, etc.**” (Daniel 12:3). **This** refers to a **judge who renders an absolutely truthful judgment**. His virtues will cause him to shine.

The Gemara expounds upon the end of the verse: “**And those who make the many righteous (will shine) like the stars forever and ever.**” **This** refers to **charity collectors**, who in the merit of causing the many to be charitable will shine like the stars.

The Gemara presents a different version of the above: **It was taught in a Baraisa [an earlier rabbinic text]: “And the wise will shine like the radiance of the firmament”—this refers to a judge who renders an absolutely truthful judgment and to charity collectors; “And those who make the many righteous (will shine) like the stars forever and ever”—these are teachers of children.**

The Gemara asks: **Who, for example,** fits this description of a teacher? **Rav said:** A teacher **such as Rav Shmuel bar Shilas**, who was extremely dedicated to his students. The Gemara relates an incident that illustrates Rav Shmuel's extraordinary dedication: **For Rav once found Rav Shmuel bar Shilas standing in a garden. [Rav] said to him: "Have you abandoned your trust?" [Rav Shmuel] said to [Rav]: "It has been thirteen years that I have not seen this garden, and even now my mind is on [the children]."** A teacher who always thinks of his students is truly making the "many" (the future generation) righteous, and like the stars will shine forever.

After revealing the tremendous honors these worthy people will receive, the Gemara asks: **And what** is written about **the Rabbis**, who study Torah constantly? The Gemara answers: **Ravina said** that the honor to be accorded the Rabbis is described in the following verse: **"But they who love Him shall be as the sun going forth in its might"** (Judges 5:31). The light that Torah scholars merit is the most brilliant light by far.

--Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 8b

(Translation: *Talmud Bavli*, The Schottenstein Edition, Mesorah Publications)